

American art and architecture

Two opposite forces have coexisted in American art since the establishment of the first colonies. On the one hand, American artists have been aware of their European cultural heritage and of continuing innovation in Europe; on the other hand, they have had to adapt European forms to the exigencies of their native situation. This interaction between rival forces is hardly unique to American art—all art grows within a tradition—but what distinguishes the American experience is the ambivalent attitudes brought to that tradition. To many of the early settlers, the ambivalence was clear, since so many of them were religious and political exiles. Yet despite the pressures of conscience and conviction, the European traditions persisted in memory, so that the first American art and architecture were adaptations of European styles and modes, modified to suit the colonists' urgent needs in a new and often hostile world. The conflict, aroused by traditions at once alienating and indispensable, has served as the underlying dynamic for the rise and progress of art and architecture in the United States.

AMERICAN ARCHITECTURE

In a virgin land the art form that developed most rapidly was the one for which the need was most pressing—ARCHITECTURE. The earliest extant buildings are the dwellings, meeting houses, and churches that made up the nuclei of the first colonial settlements in Virginia and Massachusetts. The dwellings, simple in plan and elevation, like the Adam Thoroughgood House, Princess Anne County, Va. (1936-40), resembled English houses of the late medieval or TUDOR STYLE. The most innovative in design were New England meeting houses, because the separatists sought to avoid any associations with the established church in England. These handsome buildings, such as the Old Ship Meeting House, Hingham, Mass. (1681), were either square or rectangular in plan and served as the focal center for northern towns.

Colonial Buildings

As the colonies flourished, more and more elaborate structures were required. By the end of the 17th century, most American public buildings were derived from Sir Christopher WREN's designs for the rebuilding of London after the Great Fire in 1666. The best were the so-called Wren Building (1695-1702) of the College of William and Mary and the Governor's Palace (1706-20), both at WILLIAMSBURG, Va. To stave the random growth of cities, the concept of URBAN PLANNING was introduced, beginning with Thomas Holme's grid plan of 1682 for Philadelphia, then second in population to London within the English-speaking world. By the middle of the 18th century, architects were designing churches, mansions, and public buildings in the current English GEORGIAN STYLE, named for King George I.

Post-Revolutionary Architecture

After the Revolutionary War, the first attempt to create a style expressive of the new republic was made by Thomas JEFFERSON. He based the design of the new capitol building at Richmond, Va., on that of a Roman temple, the MAISON CARREE at Nimes, France. In so doing he laid down an American precedent of modifying an ancient building style for modern use. The Virginia State Capitol (1785-96), both building and symbol, was meant to house the kind of government envisioned by Jefferson, and the Maison Carree became a paradigm for American public structures.

Jefferson was influential in setting forth the style of monumental NEOCLASSICISM that supplanted Georgian architecture with its taint of monarchy and colonialism. Monumental neoclassicism came to represent the new political and social entity that was the United States of America. Architects committed to neoclassicism designed not only the new CAPITOL OF THE UNITED STATES in Washington, first designed (1792) by William Thornton and Stephen Hallet, and other government buildings, but also factories, schools, banks, railroad stations, and hospitals, modernized by the frequent use of materials such as iron, concrete, and glass. The English-born Benjamin LATROBE, who began his American employment working with Jefferson on the Richmond Capitol, brought American neoclassicism to maturity. Latrobe invented new formal configurations for buildings as varied in function as the Bank of Pennsylvania (1798-1800) and the Centre Square Pump House (1800; both in Philadelphia and both destroyed) and Baltimore's Roman Catholic Cathedral (1806-21). Chosen in 1815 to supervise the rebuilding of the Washington Capitol, gutted by fire during the WAR OF 1812, Latrobe set about producing a truly monumental American architecture. In 1817 he procured the assistance of Charles BULFINCH, who had just completed Boston's Massachusetts General Hospital. Together the two men completed plans for the first major building phase of the Capitol.

Revival Styles

Latrobe and Bulfinch were the preeminent architects in the neoclassical mode. The generation following preferred Greek over Roman forms and produced the GREEK REVIVAL. A principal contribution of this style was a modification of the Greek prostyle temple for domestic and public buildings; the style's sphere of influence was rapidly extended north, south, and west. Major surviving examples are William STRICKLAND's Philadelphia Merchants' Exchange (1832-34) and Alexander Jackson DAVIS's La Grange (Lafayette) Terrace (1832-36) in New York. Up to the 1850s classical revival styles led to a homogeneity in American architecture that was never to prevail again.

Yet even before 1810, American architects, following the lead of their English contemporaries, had begun to introduce a rival style of the American scene—the GOTHIC REVIVAL. It is appropriate that this movement, which originated with the rise of ROMANTICISM in England, should have been taken over in a country where romanticism constituted the first intellectual flowering after the nation's founding. Not surprisingly, the style lent itself most naturally to church architecture. Richard UPJOHN, a prolific ecclesiastical architect, made his Trinity Church (1839-46) in New York the prototype for Gothic Revival churches. The style was also widely applied to college buildings, thus identifying those institutions with the prestigious English universities of Oxford and Cambridge.

Before the Civil War other revival styles such as the Romanesque, the Egyptian, and the Italian villa style were introduced, but with less applicability. More widespread was the cottage architecture for the middle class advocated by Andrew Jackson DOWNING. Moderate in price and well constructed, these Downing designs exploited the possibilities of wood both as construction material and as decoration.

Cast-Iron Architecture

An important development was the proliferation of industrial and commercial structures requiring extensive use of iron. At first engineers rather than architects were responsible for buildings that demanded advanced technical planning. Because cast- and wrought-iron columns replaced heavier masonry construction, it became possible to construct a lighter skeleton, use prefabricated modules, and introduce more glass into the facade. James BOGARDUS, an inventor and manufacturer of machinery, is generally credited with the development of CAST-IRON ARCHITECTURE, as demonstrated in his "Cast Iron Building" (Laing Stores; 1848) in New York. In his proposed plan for the Industrial Palace of the New York World's Fair (1853), also called the New York Crystal Palace, and his Wanamaker Department Store in New York (c.1859; destroyed), he pushed this type of engineered building to the limits then possible.

After the financial crash of 1857 and the Civil War, both of which had temporarily halted building construction, Americans gravitated to a style that demonstrably symbolized the nation's rapidly increasing wealth. Mansions and government and civic buildings were designed in the Second Empire style, promoted in France by Napoleon III to bolster his imperial ambitions and exemplified by John McArthur's massive Philadelphia City Hall (1874-1901). Also of great importance was the extension of the Gothic Revival into its Victorian phase. This movement, inspired by the writings of John RUSKIN, emphasized craft and permitted the manipulation of architectural detail to create bold new effects. Two great architects, Frank FURNESS and Henry Hobson RICHARDSON, emerged from Victorian Gothic; Furness created works of idiosyncratic originality, while Richardson created a new vision within a revival style.

Richardson, the most independent and imaginative architect since Latrobe, attained prominence when he gave a new Romanesque form to Boston's Trinity Church (1872-77). Besides churches, Richardson designed numerous residences, libraries, railroad stations, civic and commercial buildings, and even a prison, achieving models of their kind for each type. He favored the Romanesque because he believed it expressed the pervasive energy and dynamism of the American scene. But it was his Marshall Field Wholesale Store (1885-87) in Chicago that was to prove seminal. Its rusticated masonry and multistoried arrangement of arches, reminiscent of Romanesque and expressive of Richardson's sense of ordering masses on a large scale, would be applied by his successors in Chicago to problems of skyscraper design.

Skyscraper Architecture

The skyscraper, defined here as a tall commercial structure, is America's original contribution to the history of architecture. Commercial buildings of several stories, constructed during the 1850s in Philadelphia, anticipated the skyscraper. But before it could become a reality, architects had to incorporate the elevator into the structure. This was done, beginning in the '50s in New York. Chicago, however, was the city where skyscraper design soon attained a kind of canonical perfection.

Since many of the city's commercial buildings needed to be replaced after the great fire of 1871, Chicago served as an excellent testing ground for architects. Preeminent among them was Louis SULLIVAN. He and others working in teams evolved the glass cage that became the hallmark of the CHICAGO SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE. William HOLABIRD and Martin Roche's Tacoma Building, Daniel H. BURNHAM and John Wellborn ROOT's Reliance Building, and Sullivan's Gage Building are outstanding examples of the progressive stages in the skyscraper's development.

Yet just at the time that an architecture of originality and daring was emerging in Chicago, the New York firm of MCKIM, MEAD, AND WHITE successfully introduced a monumental Beaux-Arts style for impressive public buildings such as the Boston Public Library (1887-98). This preference for revival styles continued well into the 20th century, with interesting variations. When, for instance, New York began its campaign to raise the world's tallest buildings, their decorative systems were adapted to revival styles, culminating in the best-known Gothic skyscraper, Cass GILBERT's Woolworth Building (1913) in New York.

Modern Architecture

Far more significant than revival styles to MODERN ARCHITECTURE was, on the one hand, the unfolding of the brilliant indigenous talent of Frank Lloyd WRIGHT and, on the other, the infusion of European modernism through the work of the BAUHAUS architects Walter GROPIUS, Marcel BREUER, and Ludwig MIES VAN DER ROHE, and the independent work of Eric MENDELSOHN and Eliel SAARINEN. Wright, who early in his career worked for Sullivan in Chicago, believed that the West and Midwest embodied the "real American spirit." Acting on this belief, he designed the houses that were to win him international renown. His "prairie houses" were horizontal, often of one story, with rooms merging in a continuous open space. Wright was a man of fertile imagination; before his long career ended, he designed buildings as various as the Imperial Hotel (1916-22; destroyed) in Tokyo; the Johnson Wax Company Building (1936-39) in Racine, Wis.; and New York's GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM (1956-59).

Wright branded as "un-American" the plans and models of the European INTERNATIONAL STYLE of architecture exhibited at New York's MUSEUM OF MODERN ART in 1932, although European modernists had admired and borrowed from Wright's work. Furthermore, they had studied such American technical achievements as the BROOKLYN BRIDGE of John A. ROEBLING, Ernest Ransome's ferroconcrete cage construction for modern factories, and the midwestern multistory cylindrical grain elevators. Despite some native resistance, from the 1930s on the presence of European modernists was felt in America's urban and industrial culture. After Gropius was appointed chairman of architecture at Harvard University's Graduate School of Design in 1938, many young Americans were trained in the ideas of the German Bauhaus. After the hiatus in building produced by World War II, the influences of Wright and European modernists were balanced.

Postwar Architecture

In architecture the stark, boxy forms of European modernism by way of the Bauhaus dominated American cityscapes in the building boom following World War II. Of special importance was the use of glass curtain-wall construction for the design of large skyscrapers and other buildings, as in the United Nations complex, erected in 1947-53 under the supervision of LE CORBUSIER and Wallace K. HARRISON, and the SEAGRAM BUILDING (1956-59) of Ludwig MIES VAN DER ROHE and Philip JOHNSON.

By the mid-1970s, the reaction against the plain, unadorned "glass box" of the International Style was well underway, carried forth by Michael GRAVES, Robert A. M. STERN, and Robert VENTURI, and others, as well as by Philip Johnson. These architects returned once again to the use of color and decoration and revived such once-spurned architectural devices as the column. POSTMODERN ARCHITECTURE may have produced a few extreme statements, but the movement also brought American architecture a new vitality.

AMERICAN SCULPTURE

Of the three arts, SCULPTURE was the least appreciated in the United States until the 19th century. Expensive to produce because of the materials involved, sculpture seemed a form of conspicuous display and therefore wasteful for a democracy. Also, in attempting the nude in order to follow the outstanding European exemplars, American sculptors tended to run afoul of native Puritan attitudes. Sculptors also employed allegorical symbolism inherited from European humanist tradition, so that their work at first was little understood.

19th-Century Sculptors

The first sculptor of note was the Philadelphian William RUSH. He started as a carver of ship figureheads, and his freestanding statues, characterized by an archaic vigor, were also executed in wood. Foreign sculptors, however, made a more favorable impression at the time. Foremost among them was Jean Antoine HOUUDON, who traveled to the United States in 1785 to execute portrait busts of famous Americans, in particular George Washington. Other sculptors, such as the Italians Giuseppe and Carlo Franzoni, Giovanni Andrei, and Luigi Persico, seized the opportunity to provide the marble statues required for the Capitol Building, under construction in Washington in the early 19th century.

Aspiring young Americans, wishing to work in marble and finding no one to train them at home, soon began traveling to Italy. Horatio GREENOUGH was first in a flood tide that, between 1825 and 1875, included Hiram POWERS, Thomas CRAWFORD, William Wetmore STORY, and Harriet HOSMER, the group Henry James dubbed the "white marmorean flock." Some never returned from Italy; they worked primarily in the neoclassical style and depended on Italian stonecutters to translate their clay models into marble. It was the American-based John ROGERS, however—the modeler of statuettes, called Rogers Groups, in realistic, sentimental genre scenes—who first made sculpture appeal to a wide public, primarily through his large mail-order operation.

After 1855 the center of study shifted to Paris, where American sculptors observed that the French, under the Second Empire, received extensive government support. Wishing to create the same situation at home, they trained at the ECOLE DES BEAUX-ARTS, then joined forces with those American architects executing the grandiose commissions, both private and governmental, of the day. Augustus SAINT-GAUDENS and Daniel Chester FRENCH were the major practitioners, working in a style infused with the academic eclecticism of the Beaux-Arts tradition. The sculpture and architecture of the WORLD'S COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION OF 1893 in Chicago epitomized the Beaux-Arts phase in the United States and set the style for public monuments for almost 40 years.

Four sculptors forged visions independent of academic eclecticism. Frederic REMINGTON managed to express the raw energy of the American West in his bronze figures of cavalry charges, cowboys, and barroom brawls. Gutzon BORGLUM, realizing a failed dream of Michelangelo's, took on a mountain when he cut the giant heads of four presidents into Mount Rushmore. To George Gray Barnard, Americans owe a special debt, not only for his sculpture but also for his assembly of a superb collection of medieval sculpture now housed at The Cloisters in New York. Finally, William RIMMER, isolated and unappreciated, nevertheless worked with authority and daring to produce sculpture more like Auguste Rodin's than any American contemporary.

20th-Century Sculptors

The Armory Show, exhibiting sculptures by Constantin Brancusi, Henri Matisse, and Pablo Picasso, brought American sculpture into the 20th century. From the 1920s on, the presence in the United States of such renowned European artists as Elie NADELMAN, Max ERNST, Naum GABO, and Jacques Lipschitz, and the activities of the Museum of Modern Art, further altered the course of American sculpture.

Taking a variety of approaches to both representational and nonrepresentational forms, American sculptors invented new ways to integrate form with space: John FLANNAGAN invested animal and human shapes with a primal, dynamic energy; Joseph CORNELL created miniature fantasies by arranging subtly related small objects in boxes; Alexander CALDER gave the world a new sculptural form, the mobile; Louise NEVELSON created large, freestanding forms that restructured the experience of space; and David SMITH conceived large metal sculpture for landscape and architectural sites. The visions of these sculptors, although different from one another, combined to create a significant and influential body of works. After World War II, with the emergence of younger sculptors such as Isamu NOGUCHI, Louise BOURGEOIS, and Tony SMITH, sculpture in the United States became equal to the other arts.

Post-minimalism—an outgrowth of the postwar MINIMAL ART movement that involved such sculptors as Tony Smith, Mark DI SUVERO, and Dan FLAVIN—took sculpture off its pedestal and reduced the work to its barest statement: a tangle of wire, a strewing of old bones. The movement also introduced the installation, a notion completely antithetical to conventional sculpture. In an installation, the work must be set up by the artist before it can be viewed and therefore lasts only as long as the exhibition itself. Contemporary installed sculptures use any material that can be hung from a wall or ceiling or laid or propped on a floor, and have come to include music and projected images as well.

AMERICAN PAINTING

As architecture flourished first because it was needed, so PORTRAITURE, which was also early in demand, emerged as the first American art of PAINTING. Religious painting was unpopular in a land settled by Protestant sects, and LANDSCAPE, STILL LIFE, and GENRE PAINTING seemed too frivolous to the colonists. But images of the living, ancestor portraits to the next generation, testified to humankind's presence as a civilizing force on a wild continent. The first portraitists, working in a primitive version of the English Tudor style, were called LIMNERS (from the Old French word euminer, "to illuminate"). Limners, largely self-taught, borrowed heavily from English engravings. By 1729, however, when the Scotsman John SMIBERT brought over his casts, copies, and engravings to establish himself as a portraitist and teacher in Boston, American artists were becoming aware that their provincialism required correction.

18th-Century American Painters

The next generation produced the first major native talent in Boston's John Singleton COPLEY. His portraits, stressing surface detail and the solidity of forms, are a vivid record of such important Revolutionary figures as Paul Revere and other prominent Boston citizens. In 1774 Copley traveled to London for further academic training. His fellow American Benjamin WEST, who had made the pilgrimage 14 years earlier, took Copley into his studio. West and Copley represent American painting coming of age; they also established a precedent for later generations of artists by immigrating to Europe.

West became painter to King George III, president of the Royal Academy, and host to American artists seeking training and sympathetic support in a foreign city. West's portraits and his historical and religious paintings do not rank with the best of his English contemporaries, but as a catalyst among personalities West was outstanding, and his success enhanced the role of the artist in the eyes of Americans.

The third artist to achieve distinction before the 19th century was Charles Willson Peale. A moving force among artists, he helped launch America's first official painting exhibition in 1795 and was one of the founders of the nation's oldest museum, the PENNSYLVANIA ACADEMY OF THE FINE ARTS (1805) in Philadelphia. In addition, he fathered a dynasty of artists, both men and women (see PEALE family).

American Romantic Painters

After the turn of the century, a greater range of painting types was produced. Copley's and West's success with history paintings executed in England encouraged John TRUMBULL and John VANDERLYN to essay history paintings for an American audience. Neither succeeded in capturing the public's favor, but theirs was an ambitious failure, for they opened the field for other kinds of paintings besides portraiture. Raphaelle Peale, although unrecognized in his lifetime, persisted in the face of economic hardship as a sensitive painter of still life. Back from Europe, Washington ALLSTON executed highly original landscape and figure compositions that revealed a genuinely romantic imagination.

Portraits, however, continued to be the artist's mainstay. Artists of lesser ability fanned out to the edges of the frontier, accepting commissions wherever they could find them. Gilbert STUART and Thomas SULLY returned from England, where they had learned to paint with a lighter, unblended stroke, to become the fashionable portraitists of their day. But the most frequently painted face was that of the pater patriae, George WASHINGTON. The demand for his image continued long after his death, with Gilbert Stuart duplicating his Atheneum version (1796; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) some 70 times and Rembrandt Peale turning out 79 "porthole" portraits of Washington (the head framed by a painted stone "porthole" or oval window).

Not long after the turn of the century the artist-actor-entrepreneur William DUNLAP was sufficiently impressed with the whole artistic enterprise to calculate that the public would welcome a book on the subject. Like Giorgio VASARI in the Renaissance, he collected anecdotes about dead artists, solicited biographies of the living, added his own critical comments, and in 1834 published America's first art history, the *History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States*.

American Landscape and Genre Paintings

Two significant trends were just beginning when Dunlap's opus appeared, one in landscape painting, the other in genre painting. Landscape emerged as the subject for expressing themes of symbolic importance in a culture where the land itself was equated with the life of the people. Thomas COLE conceived great multicanvas cycles, *The Course of Empire* (1836; New York Historical Society) and *The Voyage of Life* (1840;

Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, N.Y.), which served as sermons in paint. By the 1820s a generation of painters was forming whose vision of grandiose scenes untouched by the incursions of civilization remains as a record of a lost past. Asher B. DURAND, Thomas DOUGHTY, Frederic CHURCH, John KENSETT, Sanford Gifford, and Cole all painted in the eastern mountainous regions of the Catskills and along the Hudson River valley—hence their designation as the HUDSON RIVER SCHOOL. Martin HEADE and Fitz Hugh LANE, in works now called Luminist, depicted haunting seascapes and scenes along the coastal waters and marshes. Other artists, notably Karl DODMER and George CATLIN, set out for the West to paint the terrain and the rapidly vanishing world of the Indian.

Genre painting began to grow in popularity and importance by the 1830s. Scenes of Long Island and New England life were portrayed by William Sidney MOUNT and Eastman JOHNSON. The folkways of the Midwest river towns, to which Mark Twain would later give literary form, were charmingly preserved in the paintings of George Caleb BINGHAM.

By the 1840s genre artists such as Johnson and Bingham, as well as those aspiring to history painting, such as Emanuel LEUTZE, were traveling to Dusseldorf for further training. That small Prussian town was the home of the DUSSELDORF AKADEMIE, where artists received a thorough grounding in figure drawing and composition. It was in Dusseldorf, after the Revolution of 1848, that Leutze posed German friends for what was to become an American national icon, Washington Crossing the Delaware (1851; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). There too, in 1848, the promising young genre painter Richard Caton WOODVILLE painted War News from Mexico (National Academy of Design, New York), a scene concerning America's recent victory over the Mexicans.

Painting at midcentury reflected the life of the people and received broad-based support. Genre and landscape paintings captured the rural, optimistic, and essentially innocent spirit of the times. Still lifes gave evidence of nature's bounty. Portrait commissions continued to abound, although artists had to compete with a new form of portraiture in the DAGUERREOTYPE, the first form of PHOTOGRAPHY introduced into America in 1839-40. Well-to-do businessmen felt it their patriotic duty to patronize the arts, and the American Art Union distributed paintings by lottery to a wide public.

American Art After the Civil War

The Civil War, in art as in so many other areas of American life, constituted a watershed. At war's end the earlier vision of America as the new Eden had faded. Life in the teeming cities, the struggle to survive in the business world, and the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few were the overriding realities. From the vulgarity of post-Civil War America, artists chose different avenues of escape. Some determined upon a period of expatriation. Others, principally Thomas EAKINS, Winslow HOMER, and Albert Pinkham RYDER, withdrew from the urban environment. Homer, who had provided illustrations of the Civil War for Harper's Weekly Magazine, in the 1870s favored genre scenes of a rural life that was becoming anachronistic, as depicted in The Country School (1871; Art Museum, St. Louis, Mo.). In the 1880s he turned to painting scenes of the sea, and until the end of his life he took as his leitmotiv the survival of humans against the elements, as in The Wreck (1896; Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, Pa.). Ryder, an introverted recluse, delved into his imagination to give expression to human isolation when he painted Moonlight Marine (1890-99; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) and The Race Track (Death on a Pale Horse) (1890-1910; Museum of Art, Cleveland, Ohio). He also found inspiration in Norse mythology. Eakins, following three years of training at the ECOLE DES BEAUX-ARTS, returned full of hope to his native Philadelphia. But the work he intended as his masterpiece, The Gross Clinic (1875; Jefferson Medical College, Philadelphia, Pa.), shocked Philadelphians; his use of a stripped male model for teaching life drawing to young ladies outraged them and led to his dismissal from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Following a nervous breakdown, he resumed painting, mostly introspective portraits of friends, usually gratis. Although Homer had the support of collectors, particularly successful businessmen, Eakins and Ryder became typical of the alienated American artist who worked beyond the pale of public sympathy and private patronage.

From the time of Benjamin West, artists had traveled to Europe, but by the 1870s they interacted to a greater extent with the main line of European innovation. The centers of study shifted from London and Dusseldorf to Paris and Munich. In Paris, Americans became aware, after a time lag, of realism, the revolutionary departure of Gustave COURBET from the idealizing styles then in vogue. Courbet's REALISM was an attempt to get on canvas a truthful rendition of the commonly observable facts of contemporary life. Courbet and Edouard MANET were the pioneers of realism; of the artists of the past, Diego VELAZQUEZ was the most admired. William Merritt CHASE and Frank DUVENECK, studying in Munich with the German realists, learned to paint with a loaded brush and a dark palette. John Singer SARGENT, a student of the Parisian society portraitist Emile Auguste Carolus-Durand, achieved his own facile version of realism, sometimes with remarkable success, as in his Daughters of Edward Darley Boit

(1882; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston). Even so independent a temperament as William HARNETT, the trompe l'oeil (illusionist) painter of the oddments of American life, spent four years in Munich, where he refined his realist technique.

American Impressionism

IMPRESSIONISM, which can be understood as the logical end result of realism, also was taken up, after a time lag, by Americans. In 1866, Mary CASSATT arrived in Paris and was invited by Edgar DEGAS to exhibit with the impressionist circle in 1877. She formed a close friendship with Degas, and although she never became his equal as an artist, in her chosen subjects—the mother and child, or women together—she managed subtle observations. Other Americans, in Cassatt's wake, learned to master the new impressionism. Childe HASSAM, John TWACHTMAN, Julian Alden WEIR, and Sargent created works that are distinguished by a lighter palette and unblended strokes. American impressionists differ from the French in their unwillingness to dissolve objects in light so radically.

Of the artists who chose a period of expatriation, James A. McNeil WHISTLER is the most significant. Whistler was the one American cognizant of French avant-grade developments as they were occurring. Courbet befriended the younger artist and introduced him to his creed of realism. Whistler's *The White Girl* (1862; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.) was rejected by the same Paris salon that rejected Manet's *Dejeuner sur l'herbe* (1863; Louvre, Paris) for similar reasons. In time Whistler regretted the realist influence on his art and, like Sargent, Cassatt, and the French impressionists, turned to the Japanese print as a source of inspiration. By the end of his career Whistler himself constituted an avant-garde, when he publicly propounded a theory of art for art's sake. The importance of Whistler was not recognized by Americans. Whistler created that American national icon, *Arrangement in Gray and Black No. 1, The Artist's Mother* (Whistler's Mother; 1872; Louvre, Paris); the French understood the work's significance and bought it for the Louvre. As a consequence of his neglect, Whistler repudiated his native culture. Asked why he never visited the United States, he explained "It has been suggested many times, but you see I find art so absolutely irritating to the people that really, I hesitate before exasperating another nation."

Whistler's stance toward the public was, of course, exceptional. Most artists painted to please and never more so than when they eschewed innovation to conform to the conservative tastes of the wealthy. Landscape painting continued in popularity, and two artists, Albert BIERSTADT and George INNESS, arrived at highly successful landscape formulas. Bierstadt's preferred subject was the West, which he portrayed on huge canvases concentrating on dramatic effects rendered with careful attention to detail, typified by *Mount Corcoran* (1875-77; Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.). Inness's canvases were smaller and intimate in conception, with romantic, often tree-shrouded scenes painted as though perceived through a veil, as in his *Peace and Plenty* (1865; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). William Morris HUNT and John LA FARGE, both members of the upper middle class, achieved styles that romanticized a modified realism. Hunt, who studied with Jean Francois MILLET, introduced the BARBIZON SCHOOL of painting to Americans; La Farge, after he was commissioned by Richardson to decorate the interior of Boston's Trinity Church, became the premier interior designer of his time, receiving numerous commissions for church interiors, private houses, murals, and stained glass windows.

Development of 20th-Century Painting

By the end of the 19th century, American collectors and a limited segment of the population were catching up with the understanding by some American artists of advanced trends in European painting. Mary Cassatt served the Havemeyer family with prescience when she advised them to buy impressionist works. A few Americans became early and enthusiastic patrons of artists then unappreciated by the French; thus American museums later were bequeathed important holdings of impressionist paintings. This was also the period, however, when Americans looked nostalgically to the past. Magnates amassed collections of old-master paintings; the moneyed class and the general public were one in admiring the works of French academicians and their American counterparts.

In reaction to an art of and for the middle and upper middle classes, a group of Philadelphia artists arose who chronicled the activities of the masses. Robert HENRI, George LUKS, John SLOAN, and William GLACKENS began as artists trained to provide illustrations for newspapers and magazines. Henri was their leader, and his loosely brushed, dark realist style, as in *Laughing Child* (1907; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York), was emulated by the others. These artists, who became known as the ASHCAN SCHOOL, were the first group in America to make trenchant social comments in their work. But their adherence to a realist style placed them, by the second decade of the 20th century, in the aesthetic rear guard.

The Armory Show

Innovation continued to be a European preserve. In 1913 examples of Europe's most advanced painting and sculpture were introduced to the public by the painter Arthur B. DAVIES, who organized a large exhibition of avant-garde European and American art at the 69th Regiment Armory. This, the epochal ARMORY SHOW, brought the public and the artists abreast of European modernism on native ground. Not surprisingly, some resisted the show. One critic spoke for many when he said at a press dinner, "It was a good show, but don't do it again." Nevertheless, American artists, among them Arthur DOVE, Marsden HARTLEY, John MARIN, Alfred MAURER, Georgia O'KEEFFE, and Max WEBER incorporated modernist innovations in their art. Even before the Armory Show, Alfred STIEGLITZ had exhibited these artists, together with the European modernists, at his Photo-Secession Gallery in New York. Gertrude STEIN and her circle in Paris served as another conduit for the latest European art. Finally, five important European modernist collections, those of Albert Barnes, John Quinn, the sisters Claribel and Etta Cone, Walter Arensberg, and Lillie P. Bliss, were formed. In the 1920s and 1930s the dual currents of SOCIAL REALISM and European modernism continued to flow through American cultural life. After the onset of the Depression, private patronage for artists declined alarmingly, and the federal government assumed that role under the aegis of the WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION (WPA). Artists frequently depicted subjects of social concern, often in the form of murals for public buildings, for which work of the Mexican muralists Jose OROZCO and Diego RIVERA often provided inspiration. Another infusion of European culture came about with the appearance of works by the eminent European surrealists Andre BRETON, Marcel DUCHAMP, and Max ERNST. Finally, European modernism became institutionalized with the founding of the Museum of Modern Art (1929) and the Guggenheim Museum (1937), both in New York.

Abstract Expressionism

The fall of Paris in 1940, the late critic Harold ROSENBERG wrote, shut down the laboratory of the 20th century. When experimentation started up again it was in New York and among a group of artists whose work has come to be known collectively as abstract expressionism: the painters Willem DE KOONING, Adolf GOTTLIEB, Franz KLINE, Robert MOTHERWELL, Jackson POLLOCK, Mark ROTHKO, and Clyfford STILL and the sculptor David SMITH. During the Depression many of these artists had been employed by the WPA to paint in the social realist mode. But coming to maturity in the Depression, they had a sense that their survival as artists was always in doubt. Having nothing to lose, they felt free to make radical departures from previous art. "The situation was so bad that I know I felt free to try anything no matter how absurd it seemed," Gottlieb remembered. The abstract expressionists painted for each other. Some experimented with pure color, and others needed the promptings of their subconscious. Some of their nonobjective, abstract paintings were large enough to become actual environments.

Elements of abstract expressionism had appeared in earlier paintings, and SURREALISM had made the content of the subconscious the content of its art. What made abstract expressionism distinctly American was the emphasis on the energetic large gesture essential to the creative process, and the disdain for conventional notions of beauty. By the 1950s the abstract expressionists had forged a distinctive style; for the first time since Whistler, American artists had international impact. More significantly, they achieved a new order of creation that was neither imitation nor assimilation of European art—it was a new synthesis.

Abstract expressionism has been succeeded by a number of disparate movements, of which only minimal art and PHOTOREALISM, a late 1960s movement, can be labeled as born in America. The POP ART of the 1950s erupted simultaneously in the United States and Britain. OP ART, in the 1960s, and NEOEXPRESSIONISM of the late 1970s were both international in birth and practice. In the 1980s and early 1990s, a wide-ranging eclecticism, and a mixing of the idioms and materials of painting and sculpture, have characterized the work of American painting.

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